

MARXISM & FEMINISM

Charnie Guettel



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It is no accident that the issues of women's liberation are urgent questions in Canada today. Women account for over one third of the work force. The majority of these women are working class; they make up the clerical and service base of the Canadian economy in addition to participating in industry. For these women the contradiction of their two jobs as housewives and workers is extremely acute. Equal pay for equal work, an end to job discrimination, good free child care, and paid maternity leave are the crucial demands of working women. In order to struggle for these immediate needs most effectively, to locate the cause of women's oppression, and then to fight it successfully, we must develop an adequate theory which encompasses and moves beyond these immediate demands towards a definition of women's liberation under socialism.

This essay speaks to both feminists and Marxists who feel the need to develop their understanding of women's liberation. Its author, a Marxist and an active member of the women's movement, discusses the limitations of feminist theory. She shows that to go beyond the present level of theoretical analysis we must have a sound understanding of Marxism. The essay accomplishes two things. First, it reviews past feminist writings and lays bare their liberal assumptions. Secondly, it provides the beginnings of a Marxist theory of women's liberation.

Currently there are a number of interpretations of Marxist theory and strategy being discussed in the women's movement. These debates are critical to the further development of our theoretical analysis. With such a theoretical analysis of women's role under capitalism we can begin to develop political practice on women's issues as part of the class struggle. We publish this essay now as a contribution to the ongoing debates, and with the hope that it will stimulate further theoretical inquiry.

—The Women's Press

MARXISM AND FEMINISM

WOMEN AS WORKERS

A remarkable number of articles and books on the oppression of women have appeared in recent years by authors spanning the entire political spectrum. Women interested in taking action to end their oppression have developed their analysis from various sources. Many of us are dissatisfied with a strict bourgeois feminism which simply declares that men oppress women, sometimes describes how, but does not really tell us why.⁽¹⁾ Women in the left are looking to Marxism to discover the basic causes of our oppression, and to give us the scientific understanding of our society that will enable us to develop a strategy to organize for liberation.

Most radical feminism, no matter how scathing its attack on existing institutions, is very much in the tradition of bourgeois liberalism. In his acceptance speech Pierre Elliott Trudeau defined liberalism as a creed that rested on the belief in that most delicate of institutions, the individual. In capitalism's early, relatively progressive stages, the ideology of individualism fostered by capitalism's ruling class, the bourgeoisie, contributed to a growing respect for individual initiative. It had a corrosive effect on the reactionary feudal ideas which held back economic

1. The word 'feminist' is used in two ways. In its broad sense it means all those who fight for women's rights. In the women's movement it is sometimes used to describe those women who think the oppression of women is primary, and even the source of all other oppressions, and as such some liberationists will say that they will work for women's liberation but disagree with the particular analysis of feminism. (Knowing that 'feminist' is often used by male chauvinists to discredit any woman's argument which threatens tradition, most liberationists don't go out of their way to dissociate themselves from such a label, since there is much that is useful in the feminist critique.) However, this paper uses 'feminism' in the sense of the feminist theory of women as opposed to the Marxist theory of women.

and social development. But liberalism is a contradictory ideology. Its progressive side provides a rationale for defending the rights of individuals against the state. Its reactionary side emphasizes that capitalism is not a system where one class exploits another, but it is rather a collection of individuals, any one of whom can succeed if he or she so decides. Social science then becomes a study of the power relations between individuals and a description of how our *ideas* of ourselves and others cause our condition and are the central force for change.

Marxism, which is the social science of the working class, starts from the premise that we are not what we are because of what we think, but that we think in certain ways because of the kind of work we do, or don't have to do, or are kept from doing.

Women are oppressed by men because of the forms their lives have had to take in class society, in which both men and women have been oppressed by the ruling class. For a Marxist, the material conditions of life—natural conditions, and the tools and social organization by means of which we transform nature through work—are ultimately the essential facts of human history. Oppressions are rooted in the social organizations through which one class (owners of productive means) exploits the labour of others (those who must work to live), and until the means of production are owned in common, no oppression, whether class, national, race, or sex, will be eradicated from our society. History goes forward not by the power of a few great individuals or great ideas, but by means of masses of populations transforming their environment through work, and their social relations through revolution. The main contradiction is not between men and women, but between the *forces of production*, people's labour power, machines, materials, etc., and the *property relations of production*, the ownership of almost everything by a

few capitalists who produce only for profit. The struggle between the classes is an expression of this contradiction. Capitalism tries to use reproduction, sexuality, masculine-feminine socialization of children in such a way as to make us more exploitable, not to satisfy human needs. Herein lies the special oppression of women as women, as well as of women as workers.

THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Historically, most arguments for the emancipation of women have not presupposed the above. I will argue that many of them presuppose what we have described as a *liberal* explanation of historical change. We could expand Trudeau's definition as follows: a *moralistically humanitarian and egalitarian philosophy of social improvement through the re-education of psychological attitudes*. It usually regards the freely determined individual as the moving force of history, and politics as power relationships between individuals, whether it is presupposed that individuals are innately good, evil, or formed by other individuals. Thus, its most distinguishing characteristic is that it overlooks conflicts of class interest or includes them in a peripheral way. It is precisely the overlooking of class struggle which allows liberals to delude themselves that their own moralistic propaganda will suffice to effect the necessary re-education; in Marxist terminology, they possess utopian illusions about the path to social advance.(2)

The purpose of these definitions is not to undertake a witch-hunt for liberalism in the theory of the women's movement. The ideology in the fight for freedom on most issues has been liberal, though perhaps feminism pushes liberalism to its radical extremes by questioning all institutions. Our purpose

2. What I mean by 'utopian' is explained in Friedrich Engels' **Socialism, Utopian and Scientific**, (Moscow: Progress Publishers).

is rather to show that despite some valuable insights, many of the theories are based on false views of history and are incapable by themselves, therefore, of yielding workable strategies. A good analogy is the cause of civil rights. A Marxist would say that to fight for the 'abstract rights' of individuals is incomplete, and the notion of 'abstract rights' unscientific, but would not therefore oppose a movement for democratic rights based on such a philosophy: indeed, such a movement might be an important step in the struggle to end oppression. The demand for freedom takes many incomplete, even religious forms, in the history of the fight against oppression.

It is the focusing on women's work, in factory, office, and the home, that has brought many activists to seek a deeper understanding of Marxism. As a contribution to developing a Marxist theory of women under capitalism we will re-examine some of the classics of radical liberal thought, usually referred to as feminist, and of some students of the question who are attempting a Marxist analysis. It is well to keep in mind that there is almost as much disagreement among people who declare themselves Marxists as there is between Marxists and non-Marxists. We re-examine feminist thought with a view to seeing where it can provide insights that will further our Marxist understanding, to see where it falls short, and to see if we are still falling into the same pitfalls as our liberal predecessors.

Just as in the history of all liberal thought some of the most profound humanitarian sentiments were expressed one-sidedly, or in the abstract, so were they in that part of liberal thought which addressed itself to the woman question. Mary Wollstonecraft based her arguments for equality on the same premise as the rest of her fellow eighteenth-century rationalists—the inalienable natural rights of individuals.(3) All men and women by virtue of their common humanity and

creation by God are entitled to the opportunity for full development. From the French Revolution until about 1890 this was the dominant argument used for women's rights. The Anti's would reply that what was 'natural' for the woman was the domestic sphere. The answer to this varied. Many of our feminist sisters replied that women were capable of both home and work, many hedged, but few argued that women were not at least responsible for the home, whatever potential they may develop in addition to this.

JOHN STUART MILL AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

John Stuart Mill provided the nineteenth-century women's rights movement with the classic liberal explanation and strategy. In his *Subjection of Women* much feminist thought is prefigured.

For everyone who desires power desires it most over those who are nearest to him, with whom his life is passed, with whom he has most concerns in common, and in whom any independence of his authority is oftenest likely to interfere with his individual preferences...(in the family) the possessors of power have facilities, in this case, greater than in any other, to prevent any uprising against it. (4)

Women, under separate masters, are the most divided of oppressed groups. And men prefer a willing slave to a forced slave, hence the necessity to enslave the mind. When one considers the natural attraction between the sexes, the dependence of the woman on the husband, her achievement of identity only through him "it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character." Resignation of will and meekness become an essential

3. Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Rights of Women*, (New York: Everyman's Library, 1965).

4. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, (London and New York: Everyman's Library, 1965), p.228.

part of sexual attractiveness.

What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others... no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relations with their masters.

Too true. But why are men in a position to impose their will on women, and why are women usually forced to accept their condition? The limitations of Mill's proposals to change woman's condition stem from his general view of how women got that way in the first place, that is, from his faulty historical analysis. For Mill, woman was in bondage from earliest times because of her physical weakness and sexual value to men. Force was dominant in primitive times, and civilization has been the process of replacing force with moral sentiments. Master and slave relations between men and women are unforgivable remnants of force at a time when mankind is capable of a higher morality. This simplified view of history overlooks the fact that for most of human history (before 'civilization') nothing like the exploitation of the last five thousand years existed. And it is not innate 'weakness' that has put women at a disadvantage, but her reproductive role in the context of systems of exploitation. Yet this was a common historical argument used by suffragists. It lends itself to a kind of 'be kind to animals' approach, since it is based on the notion that woman is a weak and basically sexual creature who depends on the good graces of men to improve herself. This view of history makes possible advocating a solution which does not necessarily rest on actual change of woman's position in production: Mill does not mean that women should enter into all spheres of male activity in practice. Everyone should have the right to work so that some exceptional women, for example, those particularly intelligent, may become professionals. "The power of

earning is essential to the dignity of woman if she has not independent property." As long as women possess certain legal rights commensurate with their dignity as humans, the right to divorce, marital disobedience, custody of children, property, etc., they will probably not choose to work since there is one vocation for which women have no competitors.⁽⁵⁾ That is, Mill regards childbearing and privatized childrearing as a vocation, and childrearing, by implication, as necessarily feminine. Certain 'rights' would be handed to women: to put it bluntly, male liberalism was to be the source of the emancipation of women. In other words, private property is all right, as long as it is used rationally, and as long as it is certain on paper that women are not part of that property. Presumably they are thus doubly insured against oppression.

ENGELS

Until fairly recently there has not been much interplay between Marxist and liberal thought. Contemporaneous with John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Engels was developing a scientific socialist analysis based on the most current anthropology, with a view to developing a working class strategy for women.

Engels' famous *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* is not primarily about women. That it is sometimes thought to be the last word on the question results in many misunderstandings. It simply explains how the condition of women is a result of

5. Mill overlooked in his arguments the large number of women who already **had** to work. In other works Mill espouses utopian socialism, but this does not disallow a casualness about the existence of private property itself in much of his social critique. On the woman question, at least, he keeps the two issues separate. Harriet Taylor Mill, who apparently collaborated on his **Political Economy** as well as his thinking on the woman question, went further on the question of public childcare, at any rate. See Alice Rossi's introductory essay to **Essays on Sex Equality** (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

certain developments in private property, the state, and the family.

This provides a basis for explaining the origins of women's subjection and by extension, for discovering the conditions for their emancipation. Writing in a nascent period of the social sciences there is some misinformation in Engels as there is in his principal source, Morgan's *Ancient Society*, e.g. the belief that the brain size can be correlated with intelligence. The periodization terms—savagery, barbarism, civilization, etc. have been replaced by most Marxists and non-Marxists with a different sequence of stages, which nonetheless roughly correspond to different types of subsistence: root and fruit, fishing and bow and arrow for hunting, horticulture, domestication of animals, agriculture.

Interesting is Engels' misconception of the nature of female sexuality—not surprising considering the period in which he lived. In his defense it can be said that scientific approaches to the study of sexuality are fairly recent, Masters and Johnson making the significant inroads only in the 1960's.⁽⁶⁾ What we are more concerned with is how Engels correlated sex oppression with private property, or more explicitly, the oppression of women with class exploitation.

The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamy was a great historical advance, but at the same time it inaugurated, along with slavery and private wealth, that epoch, lasting until today, in which every

6. Engels shares with other Victorians, at least by implication, the belief that males by virtue of their male sexuality are more opposed to monogamy than are women. Any such mystifications of sexuality can be laid to rest by the findings of William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson's **Human Sexual Response** (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1966). (There are many different attacks on and defenses of monogamy amongst women's liberationists, both Marxist and non-Marxist, none of them including the argument that woman is innately monogamous.)

advance is likewise a relative regression, in which the well-being and development of the one group are attained by the misery and oppression of the other. It is the cellular form of civilized society, in which we can already study the nature of the antagonisms and contradictions which develop fully in the latter.(7)

By monogamy Engels means here the paired marriage based on the supremacy of the male. It was an historical advance in the way that private property was, a contradictory way: that is, it accelerated development but brought misery, the man developed (in part) at the expense of the woman; the ruling class developed at the expense of the ruled. "The role of the man in the family, the procreation of children who could only be his, destined to be the heirs of his wealth—these alone were frankly avowed by the Greeks to be the exclusive aims of monogamy." It is the notion of a contradiction that liberalism cannot deal with. Engels differs from liberals not only in taking account of the actual concrete history of human production, but also in his use of *dialectics*. Marxists see all history as processes of development, the motive forces of which are contradictions. Every historical stage contains within it the seeds of its own change,

7. Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Moscow: Progress Publishers) p. 66. Branka Magas' excellent article emphasizes that misrepresentation of this section in Engels is key to Kate Millett's misunderstanding of Engels' theory. The first class antagonism was not **between** man and woman in monogamy, but man's oppression over woman in monogamy coincided with the first class antagonism, slavery. "Whereas Engels really argued that the development of productive forces gave rise to private property, resulting in the subjugation of women as well as the subjugation of most men, Millett's Engels argues that it is the subjugation of women that gave rise to private property (ownership of women being its first form) and thereafter to 'the total structure of human injustice'. According to her, both Mill and Engels saw the subjugation of women as the cause of other forms of oppression, and therefore she can argue that once this oppression disappears all other forms will do so as well. The class history of mankind is thereby turned into a sex theory of history." (Branka Magas, "Sex Politics: Class Politics," **New Left Review**, No. 66, March-April 1971, p.83).

and the task of the dialectical historian is to discover and map out the very complex elements of social contradictions as they are to be found in particular societies. As society develops some things get better, but in the propertied stages at the expense of more and more of society's members. Eventually, material conditions resulting from production developments make it possible for the exploited to overthrow the exploiters (the contradiction matures). Social forms contain certain contradictions which force them to change as society changes: for example the family both protects and oppresses women. When women no longer need its protections they will be in a better position to resist its oppressions. It is enough in studying the history of women to grasp that class struggle is in the long run the underlying social factor in propertied society and, in the short as well as the long run, history does not move in a straight line. In some stages and in different cultures women are better off in some respects, worse off in other respects. For example, women in primitive society possessed a certain amount of respect and dignity, but pain and early death were also conditions of that level of development. A division of labour and the intensified exploitation of nature was a condition for the advance of mankind, but the ability of humans to create a surplus, that is, something over and above what was necessary to keep one alive (subsistence), also made it worth man's while to exploit human labour, male and female.

Division of labour originally was 'natural' between the two sexes. For Engels, the man's going to war and hunting, and the woman's staying at home and gathering and preparing the food was 'natural'. A better way of describing this might be that one of society's first important cultural adaptations was assigning to the woman tasks compatible with childbearing and childrearing, and to the man (for the

most part) all others, encouraging a higher development of both kinds of tasks. What was produced had to be used in common if anyone was to survive. In the nineteenth century, ethnologists were just beginning to examine *matrilineal* societies, those in which kinship is traced through the mother. In these societies women often enjoyed considerable authority and dignity which was a challenge to the widespread belief that the 'patriarchal' family was a God-given universal. Some feminists have interpreted Engels to mean that once women ruled and were defeated by the male sex. They were defeated all right, but before that no one ruled in the way they do in class societies with states. As long as the division of labour was reciprocal there was no exploitation and hence no domination in the sense of *propertied advantage*.

At a certain point in development, let us say with the accumulation of tools, domesticated animals, and other property, the tasks in the male sphere came to give him considerable advantage over the female. With the rise of the state and professional armies the polarization of tasks became extreme. The basis of male supremacy was the development of *property* in herds and later in land, property which made necessary a state for its protection. The kind of property varies in different societies, but he who owned, say, the cattle, could exchange them for commodities and slaves.

All the surplus now resulting from production fell to the man; the woman shared in consuming it, but she had no share in owning it. The 'savage' warrior and hunter had been content to occupy second place in the house and give preference to the woman. The 'gentler' shepherd, presuming upon his wealth, pushed forward to first place and forced the woman into second place. And she could not complain. Division of labour in the family remained unchanged, and yet it now put the former domestic relationship topsy-turvy simply because the division of labour outside the family had changed. The very cause

that had formerly made the woman supreme in the house, namely, her being confined to domestic work, now assured supremacy in the house for the man: the woman's housework lost its significance compared with the man's work in obtaining a livelihood; the latter was everything, the former an insignificant contribution. Here we see already that the emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree. And this has become possible only as a result of modern large-scale industry which not only permits of the participation of women in production in large numbers, but actually calls for it and, moreover, strives to convert private domestic work also into a public industry.

Thus Engels starts from production relations. It is not just a matter of the kind of work but who owns the means of the kind of work which yields the productive surplus. It is access to this surplus that gives the property owner his advantage over others, class dominance in society, male dominance in the home. Engels goes so far as to describe the male as the bourgeois and the female as the 'proletariat'. Instead of a community of people raising children more or less collectively in the clan, the rise of the private ownership of herds and land creates a situation in which individual families become the economic unit of society. Engels quotes Marx:

The modern family contains in embryo not only slavery (servitus) but serfdom also, since from the very beginning it is connected with agricultural services. It contains within itself in **miniature** all the antagonisms which later develop on a wide scale within society and its state.

This is the economic base of the 'patriarchal' family. But development at a further stage begins to create the conditions for the emancipation of woman. In capitalist modern industry, workers—male and female—labour collectively, even while the industry is still privately owned. The economic base of society is more

and more outside the family: it is not the father's property that provides a living, but the selling of labour power to the capitalist. And this tends in some respects to weaken familial authority. Of course, the matter is considerably more complicated. The woman is thrust onto a separate labour market for low paying 'female' jobs, with the double burden of home responsibilities and work. Other conditions must exist as well. It is just that labour force participation and collectivization of domestic labour is prerequisite to these changes on a general scale.

Engels predicts that those features of monogamy which arise from property relations, dominance of the man and the indissolvability of marriage, will disappear when capitalism disappears. What forms of sex relationships develop in the future will be decided by a generation for whom sex is entirely disassociated from money or social power.

Engels concentrated on the transition from society before private property to society based on private property and exploitation, and tried to show in general how family forms and the position of women depended upon what people owned and how they made a living. He does not develop an analysis of women's oppression under capitalism and does not even mention unequal pay and the responsibilities of maternity which are central to the oppression of the double burden. Furthermore, his analysis of the family is limited to the propertied family.

Engels focuses on the emergence of the upper class family as an

instrument for the concentration of individual wealth. He does not clearly define the lower-class family as affording an important buttress for class society by making the individual acutely vulnerable to exploitation and control. The separation of the ordinary labourer from the communal security of the **gens** meant the worker was responsible as an individual not only for his own maintenance but also that of his wife and children. This to a

large measure insured not only his labour, but also his docility; it rendered him—as he is to this day—fearful of fighting against the extremities of exploitation as endangering not only himself but also his wife and his dependent children. With wonderful wit and satire, and warm sympathy, Engels deals with the conjugal relations produced by monogamy, but largely in relation to the bourgeois family. He writes of the proletarian wife who moves into public industry under conditions of great difficulty for herself and her children, but does not elaborate on the enormous ambivalence the individual family creates in the working-class man and his wife as a result of their isolation.(8)

Also in romanticizing the working class family Engels is unable to show how economic insecurity is at the heart of male chauvinism. A Marxist psychology of male chauvinism would have to start from an analysis of male fears that stem from responsibilities as a breadwinner in a class society.

Chauvinism is difficult to analyse historically because it strikes at the most intimate of human relations. We tend to be more subjective about it, ignoring it out of fear (particularly if we are male), or reading it in even when it does not exist because it is so prevalent and objectionable now. The oppression of women varies in different historical periods. In pre-historical society before exploitation there was a sexual division of labour, but also a kind of reciprocal equality between the sexes in the clan. In feudal and slave societies and in early small capitalist production, ruling class women were not the equals of ruling class men, but the majority of women were partners in oppression with their men. Moreover they were included in some social production, insofar as the home was still the scene of production, though they were chained to a cyclical round of drudgery with their men

8. Eleanor Burke Leacock, Introduction to Engels' **Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State** (New York: International Publishers, 1972), p. 42. Leacock's introduction is the most valuable current study of Engels available and mandatory reading for any serious Marxist.

which was not to be changed until advanced industrialization. With capitalism, the *possibilities* for women's emancipation created by industrial wealth are in sharp contrast to the reinforced sex roles capitalism maintains to exploit working people. Now the ideology of sexism as we know it becomes more explicit, more unjust, more bizarre. The sexism we are analyzing is that specific to capitalism. At a moment when the forces of production are highly developed and the working class partly organized, capitalism has to maintain a primitive form of work, petty housework, side by side with the advanced social production of the exchange economy. It must also maintain unequal wages to preserve a cheap supply of labour. Where it can, capitalism seeks to distinguish groups it specially exploits and oppresses by some physical characteristics, and raises its children with the blinding prejudices necessary to sustain this. Racism depends on the distinction of skin colour, sexism on the gender of a person's reproductive organs. Just as Marx and Engels had no theoretical work on racism, a phenomenon that has become a central brake on progress in the working class movement in the stage of imperialism, so did they lack a developed critique of sexism under capitalism. Their class analysis of society still provides us with the best tools for analyzing both forms of oppression, although concerning women it is very underdeveloped.

SUFFRAGE AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

While the liberal and Marxist views co-existed, it was the former which predominated in universities and in the press, and it is in this tradition that bourgeois women's rights activists sought to find explanations for their oppressions and strategies for change. There was, of course, a spectrum within liberal thought, ranging from those who limited the

struggle to the vote, to the free love anarchism of Victoria Woodhall and Tennessee Claflin. I will try to show, however, that the various strands have more in common with each other than any of them have with Marxism.

Aileen Kraditor, in an analysis of the ideology of suffragism, distinguishes the *justice* arguments (or what I have called the arguments based on the notion of abstract equality) from the *expediency* arguments used in the later period of suffragism, when many upper class women jumped on the bandwagon of the struggle for the vote and the whole character of the earlier movement changed.

The claim of women to the vote as a natural right never disappeared from the suffragist rationale but the meaning of natural right changed in response to new realities...(that is, natural right did not always extend to workers and immigrants)....Some suffragists used the expediency argument because social reform was their principal goal and suffrage the means. Other suffragists used the same expediency argument because the link of women suffrage to reform seemed the best way to secure support for their principal goal: the vote.(9)

Just what was the essence of the expediency argument? The basic assertion was that women are indeed very different, if not superior, and as mothers of the species they are the guardians of its domestic and peaceful virtues. Since so much that was formerly done in the home is extended to the marketplace and government, women must have some hand in these spheres, if only to be better wives and mothers, and extend that motherhood where it is needed. Thus motherhood, an institution which some earlier women's rights advocates had found difficulty in providing for under conditions of projected equality, became the cornerstone of arguments to include

9. Aileen Kraditor, **The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920** (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 44-45.

women in government. Government needed women because they enjoyed a natural monopoly (motherhood). They understood 'natural' to mean caring for as well as conceiving the entire human species. Feminism in its good sense, as a protest against reducing women to the reproductive role, was for the most part sold down the river. But that wasn't the only taint on the movement: all too often the predominance of this argument was an indication that for white, middle class, native born, protestant suffragists, sex role antagonism with their men was overridden by class and race similarities. For many, the vote was the crowning glory in solidifying the middle class fortress of men and women against the potential onrush of the 'unqualified' voter. How far from that first generation of suffragists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, for whom the vote was a means for further reforms for women, and such socialists as Charlotte Perkins Gillman for whom all women's rights struggles were steps in the transformation of propertied society into socialism.

William O'Neill attributes the collapse of the woman movement to the pragmatism of using motherhood arguments, and distinguishes between social feminists who were interested in the woman question only secondarily, and the feminists, who not only regarded the woman issue as primary but some of whom went so far as to criticize marriage and the family. (10)

These categories are not very helpful in politically analyzing the movement, however, since one could be very extreme on the question of women's rights and yet be estranged from the working class movement and socialism. To be 'radical' did not necessarily mean to

10. William O'Neill, "Feminism as a Radical Ideology," Alfred Young, ed., *Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1968).

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be left. For example, the issue of 'free love' was scarcely an issue for working class women at the margin of survival, except probably negatively, since loyalty to the family was so important economically. However, it was usually interpreted as daring and 'left' within bourgeois circles, and a threat to all manner of conventions. (Unfortunately, some socialists classified the birth control movement in a very mechanical way, as middle class, accusing its proponents of seeing overpopulation as the main enemy, rather than capitalism. Of course, for many middle class women, birth control was seen in this way, but this does not mean that access to birth control is not a working class issue.)

In any event, O'Neill overlooks the significance of the beginnings of a socialist analysis of women's oppression. The great historical materialists Friedrich Engels and August Bebel were using the first ethnological discoveries to establish a scientific basis for believing that the full development of men and women is equally possible in practice. But the women's movement was for the most part neither socialist nor working class, and it is beginning to be both these things only now when there is a basis for these developments in society, a material basis predicted in part by the early historical materialists.

INTERIM PERIOD

But then followed the great ideological void on the woman question. The bourgeois women's movement, with few exceptions, began its period of disassociating itself from feminism, and all too often the left in capitalist countries, in part disillusioned with the limited middle class demands of much of the women's rights movement, but also for reasons of internal chauvinism, took a similar position. Although in many real ways women in socialist countries were to become

the world's most liberated, merely pointing to some gains under socialism was an inadequate substitute for a theory of women under capitalism, or indeed a theory of women in the pre-communist period of socialism where scarcity still puts limitations on liberation. I am speaking here specifically of progress in the theory of women's liberation. Why should August Bebel's *Women and Socialism*, which went through about forty editions in less than a generation, have been the last serious study by a Marxist of this question, or at least the last extensive one published in many languages? (11)

An obvious reason is that the next major strategy works would have to come from a women's movement, since practice is necessary to push theory forward. Not only was the movement limited, but women were disadvantageously represented in producing extensive theoretical works of any kind because few received higher education, and most of those who did were burdened with family responsibilities. Only recently is this being overcome to some extent. There is also such a thing as backlash, both capitalist and male, and to even raise any question in their own interests women have been forced to fall all over themselves protesting that this does not in any way threaten the sanctity of the home, etc., etc. Probably most important, not only the women's movement but all social movements of the left in capitalist countries were set back by the relative material success of imperialism. Part of this was what O'Neill refers to as the "conservative backlash of the Gilded Age." The tendency to dilute the cause for small gains was also a trend in what Lenin called the 'labour aristocracy', which all too often divided itself from the rest of the working class by tying its interests with imperialism. The super-exploited unorganized

11. A number of shorter works were widely circulated, such as the recently reprinted **Communism and the Family** by the Bolshevik Alexandra Kollantai (London: Pluto Press, 1971).

were so divided by employer counter-attack, race, nationality, sex, etc., that they had difficulty organizing over wages, let alone women's issues. Womankind, like mankind, does not set itself problems it cannot solve, and until women were securely and irrevocably in social production there was no base for their movement. The woman movement as such in capitalist countries never had a working class base until this time around; it is historically false to characterize the turn of the century movement as working class, regardless of militancy. Socialist thought tends to approximate, in the long run, the possibilities of the working classes it deals with. Another reason is related to this, and still applies. A feminism which necessarily focuses its criticism on the family cannot get very far so long as the working class needs families for survival. And this is a factor affecting the influence of feminism on the current working class movement.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND MODERN RADICAL FEMINISM

The next major inquiry into the position of women wasn't to come until after World War II and it was not Marxist. Rather I think it can be considered a development within radical liberal thought. This is of course Simone de Beauvoir's great existential work, *The Second Sex*, which is easy to criticize now, but for which de Beauvoir was considered a great social threat in the fifties. (12)

To benefit from a reading of de Beauvoir one must distinguish between her existentialist theory, which is inadequate, and the valid sociological insights which do not necessarily depend on her theory.

For de Beauvoir, woman is always the 'other', the

12. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).

immanent (passive) who is dependent on man and therefore can live only through him: it is the man who transcends, or plays the creative role in society. The woman is socialized to be satisfied by passivity, or to make her mark on the world in only feminine ways. In the best tradition of classical liberalism, the positive side, de Beauvoir argues that "woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with man, that is to say, her possibilities should be defined." A common form of the nineteenth century equal rights argument was that women are not now 'equal' because of their history of subjection, but they must have every opportunity for becoming equal. But while de Beauvoir's descriptions of the formation of feminine character are illuminating and force us to recognize so much of what being a woman means, her analysis of women in history and therefore her theory of women falls short of providing a women's movement with any kind of collective strategy. I think this follows from the moralistic terms in which she places the question.

DeBeauvoir describes existentialist ethics thus: every individual transcends through his projects (a technical term meaning constantly forging a future); liberty is the continual reaching out for more liberty in an indefinite future. Anything else is stagnation, immanence, subjection. "This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil." Transcendence is the only justification for existence, and to the argument that housewives are happy being 'immanent' de Beauvoir would respond "...I am interested in the fortunes of the individual as defined not in terms of happiness but in terms of liberty." This might make some sense in describing an upper middle class woman who chooses to be a wife rather than to create her own 'project', but even here the element of choice is dubious. Cer-

tainly for most working class women, that is for most women, the alternative to housewifery is not a "continual reaching out towards other liberties" but a drudge job which is added on to domestic labour. It is true that in our society man is considered the essential and woman the inessential who depends on the fortunes of males, but whether the solution lies in enticing women to risk resistance as *individuals* is another matter.

To make her position clearer we must understand de Beauvoir's reasons for dismissing historical materialism. Her understanding of how Marxists regard technology's influence is revealing. The change from communal ownership to private ownership could not, according to de Beauvoir, have been decisive in the subjection of women if man did not himself relate to property in a certain way, if he did not regard it (and women as part of his property) as his 'project'. And why wasn't the association of male and female friendly? Enslavement was "a result of the imperialism of the human consciousness seeking always to exercise its sovereignty in objective fashion. If the human consciousness had not included the original category of the Other and an original aspiration to dominate the Other, the invention of the bronze tool could not have caused the oppression of women." (This is how de Beauvoir interprets Engels' connection between the bronze age and the transformation of social relations that enslaved women.) However, 'imperialism of the human consciousness' sounds like a concept of innate aggression, and this is the kind of explanation to which Marxists have tried to develop an alternative.

It is interesting that T. Grace Atkinson, a contemporary radical feminist, takes a view similar to de Beauvoir's in that it presupposes innate aggression. Atkinson goes a bit further and describes the process of the enslavement of women as 'metaphysical cannibalism'.

It is to eat one's own kind, especially that aspect considered most potent to the victim while alive, and to destroy the evidence that the aggressor and the victim are the same. The principle of metaphysical cannibalism seemed to meet both needs of Man: to give potency (power) and to vent frustration (hostility)...Some psychic relief was achieved by one half of the human race at the expense of the other half. (13)

Most feminists would not acknowledge Atkinson as a spokeswoman for the movement. I use her as an example because she states the presuppositions of her theory of society. Of course most feminists would not agree with her view of human nature. But as I intend to show, much feminism is based on some kind of concept of power relations between individuals on the basis of strength, to be overcome only when humanity prevails not by a show of strength but through higher forms of action. Presumably, we would learn this through education, hence eliminating male-female division of labour. In this respect such feminism can be regarded as a development within radical liberal thought; a Marxist theory emphasizes that to make those kinds of changes in education, *production relations would have to change first*, or at some point, in order to make educational changes sufficiently far-reaching, and to create new social institutions to provide the conditions for equality.

KATE MILLETT

Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* is one of the most popular statements of the feminist position. In describing certain psychological realities it is razor sharp, but her analysis of the way society works has

13. Grace Atkinson, "Radical Feminism," **Notes from the Second Year**, Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, eds. (New York, 1970), p. 36. Atkinson is also explicit that by class she means women as a class.

some of the limitations of the radical feminism already considered.(14)

Politics for Millett is not the state or political parties but "power structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another." In what she calls "notes toward a theory of patriarchy" she attempts to "prove that sex is a status category with political implications." Economic power for Millett is a consequence of psychological domination. She defines our society as a patriarchy with the power to 'condition the consent' necessary to legitimize its authority. Distinctly human activity is reserved for the male; the female is conditioned to the biological, cyclical sphere. Status is for Millett one's political position, role the sociological, and temperament the psychological. Very little is innate, but most that is learned is conditioned by the patriarchal family.

Politically, the fact that each group exhibits a circumscribed but complementary personality and range of activity is of secondary importance to the fact that each represents a status or power division. In matter of conformity patriarchy is a governing ideology without peer; it is probable that no other system has ever exercised such complete control over its subjects.

The family mediates between the individual and society and therefore crucially affects the total personality. Millett regards the female as having "fewer permanent class associations than does the male. Economic dependency renders her affiliations with any class a tangential, vicarious, and temporary matter." As for patriarchy

a referent scarcely exists with which it might be contrasted or by which it might be confuted. While the same might be said of class, patriarchy has a still more tenacious and powerful hold through its successful habit of passing itself off as nature.

14. Kate Millett, **Sexual Politics** (Garden City; Doubleday and Co. Inc. 1970).

One can see then why Millett regards the sexual revolution which contested the universal patriarchy as the historical development central to the liberation of women. The struggle for the vote, divorce, etc. which accompanied the beginnings of the sexual revolution made inroads on the patriarchy but was immediately met by a period of reaction, described by Millett as the counter-revolution. It was not just that sexual revolution was crushed in a counter-attack, the revolution itself extended only to some formal and flagrant injustices, "leaving the socializing processes of temperament and role differentiation intact," a "psychic structure, deeply imbedded in our past, capable of intensification or attenuation, but one which, as yet, no people have succeeded in eliminating."

Millett's preoccupation with 'psychic structures' is an indication of her view of social change. She emphasizes changing attitudes, rather than necessarily transforming the production relations which in the long run cause these attitudes. This is why it is fair to classify her variety of feminism as a form of liberalism, and her theory of history as idealist, as opposed to materialist.

It must be clearly understood that the arena of sexual revolution is within the human consciousness even more pre-eminently than it is within human institutions. So deeply embedded is patriarchy that the character structure it creates in both sexes is perhaps even more a habit of mind and a way of life than a political system.

But where does character structure come from within each generation? For a Marxist, consciousness is not transmitted autonomously from the minds of one generation to those of the next. Psychic realities are always bound to the social and production relations of a society, through social institutions—including the family—that are created out of very real material needs. Habits of mind cannot simply be enforced

through psychological pressures. They are products, in our case, of a propertied social order which is preserved by a class-based state. Indeed family forms are backed by law (courts, prisons, police). Laws are made by a class that controls the surplus, and hence the state. True, masculine-feminine character patterns are far-reaching and will take generations to eliminate, but that is because they are based on a male-female division of labour, the elimination of which requires the transformation of not only the forces and relations of production but also the vast superstructure of social institutions. (And it does not happen automatically and instantly even when the workers take power, particularly when besieged by imperialism.)

It is her view of history that allows Millett to be so casual about class relations (how 'temporary' a matter is class position to a working class woman?) and about the very real emancipation of women developing in socialist countries. This stands out in Millett's treatment of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as comparable examples of the sexual counter-revolution, a misrepresentation of even a surface view of history.

A defining characteristic of radical liberalism since 1917 is a naive view of the transition to socialism and consequently a disenchantment with existing socialism. This stems from two of our tenets of liberalism: 1) belief in the power of ideas alone to cause social change, and 2) reliance on individuals to transform their own personal lives—in this case into socialist lives. Sometimes it seems that their very position as radicals drives certain leftists to dissociate themselves from existing socialism, as well as from groups such as the Communist Party which acknowledges existing socialism to be progressive. Similarly, many radical feminists remain oblivious to the actual gains made by women under socialism.

sometimes as an over-reaction to the early expectations of utopians who expected immediate liberation. Simone de Beauvoir did not call herself a feminist until she became thoroughly disillusioned with existing socialism, which contributes to the use of the term feminism to describe an *alternative* to socialism rather than seeing women's liberation developing from existing socialism.(15)

As a consequence of this attitude the history of women in the Soviet Union is popularly related in the manner of Kate Millett. According to the story, initially the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held to the Engelsian promises of abolition of the family, abortion on demand, universal daycare, equality etc. But Stalinism reversed these developments and left women much as they had been under capitalism.

What actually happened was far more complicated. The Soviet Union had the economic base in 1917 to lift women from feudalism, and yet they managed in addition to grant equality before the law, equality in training and access to male professions, daycare (at least in the cities), and very importantly, universal literacy. Revoking the right to abortion, which has long since been corrected, was Stalinist, and a distortion of socialism, but must be seen against a network of other positive developments, as well as itself being a response to the severe population problems inflicted by imperialist war.

Millett accurately points out the relevance of Engels' assertion that patriarchal authority rests on the economic dependence of members of the family. But Engels goes further in stating that 'patriarchy' itself as a form of authority is a result of the mode of production. Patriarchy is considered an imprecise term by anthropologists, though it has been used to describe certain forms of class society (for example,

those consisting of households of slaves.) If it simply means male-dominated then we must establish terms to distinguish between various stages, since there are different kinds of societies that are male-dominated. For example, a crucial difference between a 'patriarchal' nomadic society and bourgeois industrial society is the gradual entrance of women into the industrial labour force. Describing all societies as simply patriarchal masks this historical progression. Victorian families can be characterized as patriarchal in the sense that they are male-dominated, but as production increasingly takes place outside the family, the society is more accurately characterized by features behind the family—in the case of capitalism, industrial property relations and the state. That is, there are other causal factors than the lineage system and parental control that become increasingly important as society develops.

Millett interprets Engels to mean that "due to the nature of its origins, the family is committed to the idea of private property in persons and goods." But it is not just an *idea* of property, but *actual property relations* which leave women under the control of men and in the capitalist stage the labour power of both men and women becomes a commodity to be purchased by the capitalist. In other words, Millett has done what feminists all too often have done with Engels; that is, she gleaned some of his historical information, some of his comments about women in production and the public rearing of children, without integrating that into the basis of his theory, which is really a theory about family, *private property*, and the *state*. Male-female relations do not necessarily define a stage of society, they themselves are products of a given class system.

While Millett recognizes the shortcomings of John Stuart Mill's faith in the legal solution, and differs in her conclusions, she argues most of her case in the

spirit of Mill, and shares the psychological—i.e. non-socio-economic approach to the woman question associated most famously with his work. Many contemporary socialist liberationists feel, however, that traditionally, Marxists have underestimated the significance of reproduction and socialization of children in the total condition of women. As long as childcare is 'female' no matter how public, certain inequalities will persist. Juliet Mitchell rightly points out that while Bebel in focusing on women added "the biological element—her maternal function" as "one of the fundamental conditions that made (the woman) economically dependent on the man," still he "was unable to do more than state that sexual equality was impossible without socialism." (16) Now that socialist countries exist, and there is the prospect of other even more industrialized countries becoming socialist, the question of changing the totality of women's condition is no longer academic for socialists. The editors of *Women: A Journal of Liberation* suggest that a Marxist history of women requires consideration of hitherto unemphasized factors:

Marx and Engels made enormous contributions to an understanding of the process of history, but we think this process can be understood in a slightly different way to provide a more complete understanding of how strongly human reproduction and socialization have affected history. This vital aspect of history has been ignored, not only by Marxists, but by all theorists of history. We contend that this approach may span the gap between the study of large groups of people offered by Marx and the more specific understandings which are needed when we deal with individual consciousness and behaviour. Through an understanding of the role of reproduction-socialization we can understand the operation of the superstructure with more accuracy. (17)

16. Juliet Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution," **New Left Review**, No. 40 (November-December, 1966), p. 15.

17. Editorial, **Women: Journal of Liberation**, Vol. 1 No. 3 (Spring 1970), p.35.

JULIET MITCHELL

Juliet Mitchell attempts to provide a Marxist model for studying women in the family by incorporating concepts from structuralism. Mitchell follows French Marxists like Louis Althusser in employing some of the work of French structuralists, like Claude Levi-Strauss and others. This approach divides society into several "structures". Although the structures may inter-relate originally, still each has laws peculiar to it. By adopting this perspective, Mitchell and other Marxists hope to focus attention on the family, socialization of children, etc., in order to bring out what is peculiar to them and to see the ways in which their histories have a relative autonomy.

According to Mitchell, for Marxists traditionally women's condition has been "deduced derivatively from the economy" or "equated symbolically with society." But it should rather be considered a *specific* structure, which is a unity of different elements. Historically, the elements have been variously combined. "Because the unity of women's condition at any one time is the product of several structures, it is always 'overdetermined'." Overdetermination is a technical structuralist term. By this term structuralists mean that no social change is brought about by any one sort of force (e.g. economic ones), but requires that different sorts of 'structures' (scientific ideas, religion, political conditions, modes of work, etc.) all have some influence. Mitchell lists the key structures of women's condition: Production, Reproduction, Sex, and Socialization of Children. Altogether they comprise woman's condition, but each "may have reached a different 'moment' at any given historical time." Structural interpretations of Marxism vary, but Mitchell's understanding of Louis Althusser's approach is important in clarifying her theory of the separate structures of women's condition. She summarized a point in Althusser's *Con-*

tradiction and Overdetermination thus:

Althusser advances the notion of a complex totality in which each independent sector has its own autonomous reality but each of which is ultimately but only ultimately, determined by the economic. This complex totality means that no contradiction in society is ever simple. As each sector can move at a different pace, the synthesis of different time-scales in the total social structure means that sometimes contradictions cancel each other out and sometimes they reinforce one another. To describe this complexity Althusser uses the Freudian term 'over-determination.' The phrase '*unité de rupture*'...refers to the moment when the contradictions so reinforce one another as to coalesce into the conditions for a revolutionary change.

Perhaps in discussing Mitchell it becomes a question of how 'ultimate' is the effect of the 'economic' factor, meaning this in the broad sense of mode of production, which includes the propertied relations of classes. *

Mitchell describes the internal contradictions of the separate structures. Woman's role in production has not been due to her physical 'weakness'; the cause is not 'biological' in this sense but social. If it were a case of weakness alone, machine technology and automation of itself could be expected to liberate women, but this has not happened. Of course equality in production is prerequisite to woman's liberation, but creating the conditions for equality in production requires an understanding of the part reproduction plays in a woman's life. It is woman's role in reproduction that has made her socially inferior, including not just the bearing and rearing of children but managing the family. The causal chain is as follows: "Maternity, Family, Absence from Production and Public Life, Sexual Inequality." What society assumes is the idea of the family. Mitchell breaks down women's role in the family into three structures which now compose it "but which tomorrow may be decomposed into a new pattern": reproduction,

sexuality, and the socialization of children. The 'mode of reproduction' has not varied with the 'mode of production'.

As long as reproduction remained a natural phenomenon, of course women were effectively doomed to social exploitation. In any sense they were not masters of a large part of their lives. They had no choice as to whether or how often they gave birth to children (apart from repeated abortion); their existence was essentially subject to biological processes outside their control.

Contraception provides the "technical possibilities for the humanization of the most natural part of human culture." Easily available contraception threatens to divorce sex from reproduction, apparently a threat to the bourgeois family.

Because women are still defined by their biological function, maternity, children remain 'products', the objects of women's 'creativity'. The objectification of children is a consequence of the mother's misconstruing her reproductive role as a productive role. Control over the children is a compensation for maintaining the home as a retreat for the man.

So long as (maternity) is allowed to remain a substitute for action and creativity, and the home an area of relaxation for men, woman will remain confined to the species, to her universal and neutral condition.

Sexuality, the third structure, "can be assimilated to the statute of possession much more easily and completely than the productive or reproductive relationship." Mitchell discusses some of the contradictions in the history of sexuality. Polygamy involved an extreme form of degradation for women, although monogamy in its present form is not an absolute improvement. In the West, Christian monogamy was accompanied by a great wave of sexual repression. Mitchell suggests that *equality under monogamy* may be a precondition for sexual liberation. Sexual freedom is two-sided, however—it can be

exploited by the "totally co-ordinated and drugged social machine," as well as containing possibly "the greatest potential for liberation."

Socialization of children, the last structure, is part of the 'expressive' role of women. This term is taken from Talcott Parsons, who goes so far as to divide human organisms into "lactating and non-lactating classes." While the father may be instrumental, both towards the outside world and in relation to the wife-mother (instrumental meaning something like *being able to take effective action toward*), the mother is instrumental only during a certain period of a child's development, and only towards that child. As the economic function of the family has declined and the frequency of reproduction has been reduced, the socialization of children in families has come to be regarded as full-time work in itself.

Mitchell's conclusion is that "the liberation of women can only be achieved if *all four structures* in which they are integrated are transformed. A modification of any one of them can be offset by a reinforcement of another, so that more permutation of the form of exploitation is achieved."

Mitchell has attempted to provide a framework for analyzing women, and has raised the kinds of questions a Marxist theory of women must meet. But whether or not abstracting these four structures is adequate to the task is another matter. For nowhere is social class as a 'structure' considered, and the integration of this would change the emphasis, particularly in production, but in all the other structures as well. The family itself varies by class. And by class I mean class as it affects the total condition of woman, including class war within a society, class war between nations, that is, imperialism in an era of proletarian states as well as capitalist states.

According to Mitchell, even though militant suffragism "surpassed the labour movement in the

violence of its assault on bourgeois society," the situation of women remained almost the same. To conclude that the radical critique of the family and the feminist demonstrations were more militant than the struggles which labour (including female labour) underwent for generations in combatting their employers is, to say the least, inaccurate. The suffrage movement went no further because it was based primarily on middle and upper middle class women, most of whom did not carry their demands further than certain legal equalities because that was as far as their class was willing to go.

Mitchell paints a picture of defeat for women's liberation in socialist countries as well. Not only is this a short view, but it is a false view of how social transformation takes place in history. Property relations are transformed by a maturation of contradictions, and acquiring state power can result in a total reversal of those relations. But the consequences of state power transference to the proletariat unfold over generations during the development of the forces of production, particularly in an underdeveloped country. And regardless of existing contradictions and underdevelopment, certain real advances in socialist countries have occurred, however incomplete; people fight and die for them and are right to do so. Not everything in society is transformed all of a piece or with a total 'unité de rupture'. There is a more or less long historical process leading up to the qualitative moment of change of direction, including popular struggles on many levels. Whatever Mitchell gained in the way of (much needed) focus on the complexity of women's roles, her de-emphasis of class obscured the perspective on long range developments, and especially the potentialities of progress for women under existing socialism. Concluding that it "is only in the highly developed societies of the West that an authentic liberation of women can be envisaged

today" reveals a certain casualness not so much about the prerequisite of socialism, with which Mitchell would agree, but about the fact that in certain important respects socialism has already overtaken the 'West' in the liberation of women.

But this might stem from an idealistic concept of what the 'moment' of revolution is. The appeal of the structuralist interpretation of Marxism is that it potentially gives more weight to the superstructure in causative analysis than is usually the case with Marxists. When factors in the base (forces and relations of production), and factors in the superstructure reach different moments, or may be pulling in different directions, which I do not deny happens, it is features of the superstructure—*idea* of the family, *idea* of woman, that seem to be sufficient in Mitchell's scheme for a significant 'unité de rupture'. The three of Mitchell's structures which constitute the lynch pin of women's conditions are *ideological*. No historical materialist would dispute the effect of ideology in the short run, particularly in a revolution, which is, if anything is, such a moment. The question might be put: how long is the short run? And what are the conditions that allow the ideological factor to be effective in the first place?

Mitchell's application of structuralist Marxism seems to ignore the dialectical relation between the mode of production (base) and superstructure, at least as regards the transformation of state power. Indeed, state power is a factor which is absent from her analysis entirely, more specifically class acquisition of state power. Class is not just another complex contradiction; it is *central* to the Marxist theory of history. Ideologically, it is one's stand on the class-based state, whether or not one supports the dictatorship of the proletariat, that defines one in the Marxist spectrum, not one's position on the family issue. So much the worse for Marxism, might be the feminist reply.

But since it is a question of class control of the state, and it is the state which enforces whatever forms of family suit the mode of production in the interests of the class or classes in power, women's position *within* the contending classes determines her role in the struggle. Women must be workers before they can significantly affect worker power; that is part of the significance of Engels' emphasis on production.

I suggest that disregarding the importance of the revolutionary transformation from bourgeois to proletarian state power allows the problem to be formulated in such a way that one's only choices are reformism or utopian socialism. Mitchell rejects reformism, that is making changes in the family without raising the question of socialism, though most of the discussion of 'structures' is without reference to property relations, the crucial factor in the scientific socialist analysis of capitalism. We might define utopian socialism as understanding a socialist revolution to be a moment when all structures have been revolutionized, presumably the critical ones all at once, and this appears to be the kind of revolution implied in Mitchell's article and also her recent publication *Woman's Estate*.⁽¹⁸⁾ The importance of the article in the developing ideology of the movement lies not, however, in its recommendations for action. It does not pretend to include a program, although one could argue that its theory does not provide for a link between immediate demands, such as daycare and equal pay, and the general transformation of women's condition. But its whole purpose was to call for such a theory. Mitchell was ahead of most theorists of women in raising a critique of traditional Marxism that Marxists would have to meet if Marxist thought on women was to develop any further. And from this point

18. The **New Left Review** article criticized here was subsequently incorporated into Juliet Mitchell's book **Woman's Estate** (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1971).

(1968) women went in both Marxist and feminist directions, often starting from a critique similar to Juliet Mitchell's:

The error of the old socialists was to see the other elements as reducible to the economic; hence the call for the entry of women into production was accompanied by the purely abstract slogan of the abolition of the family. Economic demands are still primary, but must be accompanied by coherent policies for the other three elements (reproduction, socialization, and sexuality), policies which at particular junctures may take over the primary role in immediate action.

Before we attempt to meet this criticism, it is well to note that many of the 'old socialists' Mitchell probably includes in her charge at least saw the relation between immediate demands against the capitalist state, (and they were not all directly economic), and the struggle for socialism which they felt to be prerequisite for the liberation of women. With this in mind they neither overestimated, as did many of their contemporary bourgeois suffragists, nor underestimated, as do many women's liberationists today, the contradictory role of even such a reform as suffrage. Even legal reform is a gain, however limited, for women, insofar as it pushes the movement forward and heightens contradictions which press to be resolved. Universal suffrage and formal legal equality lay bare the real causes of workers' oppression when the workers see that formal equality before the law and a vote still do not end exploitation. In *Origin of the Family* Engels describes this as a step toward creating the conditions for making more far-reaching demands.

The peculiar character of man's domination over woman in the modern family, and the necessity, as well as the manner, of establishing real social equality between the two, will be brought out into full relief only when both are completely equal before the law. It will then become evident that the first premise for the emancipation of women is the re-introduction of the entire female sex into public industry; and that this again demands that the

quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unity of society be abolished.

Complete equality before the law was a goal of the bourgeois women's movement, and advances towards this, its limited contribution. *Formal* equality before the law is possible under capitalism, although the first example of complete equality took place only with the first socialist revolution. And it did become apparent, as was anticipated, that many economic and social developments, including new generations of children educated equally, with equal access to productive roles, were prerequisite to revolutionizing the family in practice, developments hindered in large measure by imperialist intervention and fascist war within the space of just one of these generations. It is from such an historical perspective that one must approach the uneven course of the liberation of women under socialism. Understanding this will have not a little effect on the ideology of socialist women fighting capitalism.(19)

FIRESTONE

Shulamith Firestone's feminism is not unusual in purporting to develop from and beyond Marxism. To formally disavow Marxism is not in vogue, but I think this is misleading. *The Dialectic of Sex* is actually a radical feminist alternative to the explanation begun by Engels.

Firestone describes her theory as historical materialist: Marxism is to her what Newtonian physics

19. Included in the growing literature on women in socialist countries is Chris Camerano's "On Cuban Women," **Science and Society**, Vol. 35 (Spring 1970), and William Mandel's "Soviet Women and Their Self-Image," **Science and Society**, Vol. 35 (Fall 1971), and "Soviet Women in the Workforce and Professions," **American Behavioral Scientist**, Vol. 15 (November-December 1971).

is to the theory of relativity.

For an economic diagnosis traced to ownership of the means of production, even of the means of reproduction, does not explain everything. There is a level of reality that does not stem directly from economics.

Not that there is a psychosexual reality behind economics, for this would contradict historical materialism. Firestone attempts "to develop a materialist view of history based on sex itself." In her view de Beauvoir came closest to this, but Firestone asks:

Why postulate a fundamental Hegelian concept of Otherness as the final explanation—and then carefully document the biological and historical circumstances that have pushed the class 'women' into such a category—when one has never seriously considered the much simpler and more likely possibility that the fundamental dualism sprang from sex itself.(20)

Procreation, a biological process, is at the basis of the sexual dualism. Woman's nurture of infants creates a biological imbalance within the family itself. Just as socialism requires a seizure of the means of production by the proletariat, so

the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of the control of reproduction: the restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, as well as feminine control of human fertility, including both the new technology and all the social institutions of childbearing and childrearing. And just as the end goal of a socialist revolution was not only the elimination of the economic class **privilege** but of the economic class **distinction** itself, so the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male **privilege** but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally...The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes

20. Shulamith Firestone, **The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution** (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

equally, or independently of either, however one chooses to look at it: the dependence of the child on the mother (and vice versa) would give way to a greatly shortened dependence on a small group of others in general, and any remaining inferiority to adults in physical strength would be compensated for culturally. The division of labour would be ended by the elimination of labour altogether (cybernation). The tyranny of the biological family would be broken.

For Firestone, all other oppressions stem from the original oppression in the patriarchal family. For example, racism is a justification for the whites treating the blacks like children in a 'family of man.'⁽²¹⁾

Radical feminism is the key, then, to actually reorganizing society; as such it is a 'solder' of the radical movement as a whole and is

developing a new way of relating, a new political style, one that will eventually reconcile the personal—always the female prerogative—with the public, with the "world outside", to restore that world to its emotions, and literally to its senses.

In Firestone's scheme the male and female principles which arise from the biological family are the determinants of all culture. While repudiating the chauvinist clinical applications of Freudian insights, Firestone credits Freud with grasping the "crucial

21. One of the gravest errors committed by narrow feminism divorced from class analysis is the non-existent or cursory attention paid to racism, such as the above. The consequence is ignoring the very special position of, for example, black women, triply jeopardized in a racist, sexist, class society. The black slave woman was a partner in forced labour with her man, denied the luxury of any kind of passivity. The story of the heroic contributions of the black woman has scarcely been told although a beginning is made in the very important article by Angela Davis, "On Black Women" in *Ms* (August 1972), a good antidote to Firestone's casual treatment. Male chauvinism in the context of racism has a special character, and cannot be simply equated with the chauvinism experienced by women protected from the worst ravages of racism by their skin colour.

problem of modern life: Sexuality." It is well to note that despite Firestone's insistence that the proletarian revolution is a stage towards liberation, the actual proletariat in her own country is dismissed. The "problem is much deeper than merely the struggle of the proletariat, which in any case is hardly the American vanguard." Firestone's analysis seems to be out of touch with the working class. "In the sixties the boys split. They went to college and down South. They travelled to Europe in droves. Some joined the Peace Corps; others went underground."

But most boys went to work or the army. I think this is an indication of the many ways Firestone has got around Marxism rather than beyond it. Focusing on sexuality allows her to remain in the realm of the private, the psychology of the individual. It is no accident that her analysis is consistent with Freudian categories, since for her the repression of sexuality is the key to all socialization. Exploitation is in no way a central concept. Her category of oppression is very much like Freud's concept of civilization; the moving historical forces are comparable. While it is not possible here to respond to all Firestone's points, particularly concerning the oppression of children, we can list two ways in which the sexual dualist theory of history is not consistent with Marxism.

In the first place, theoretically in Firestone's scheme we must believe that the way of having and raising babies is more important than the mode of work, the social complexity of which for Marxists is what distinguishes humans from other species. We are also asked to believe that the male-female principles extending to more than just reproductive roles are biologically based, which means we are postulating extensive innate differences between the sexes.

In the second place, we are left with no way to get from here to liberation, since the sisterhood alliance Firestone advocates would only be effective *after* we

get control of the means of production (and how this without the male working class?) Getting from here to there means relying on our *femaleness*, which includes character traits that have either been imposed on us by a male-dominated culture (Millett's emphasis) or pervade our culture because of the enormity of the effect of reproduction on our character formation (Firestone).

The tactic of "consciousness-raising" is certainly a valid component of the women's movement, and Firestone's insights into the nature of romantic love, like de Beauvoir's descriptions of female socialization and Millett's analysis of male sexuality, are at least suggestive in themselves. But the difficult task of a political ideology is to provide a way for the private change of consciousness to develop into a public transformation of concrete reality and vice versa. All four spheres, the private, the conscious, the public, and the active are all inter-related. But an ideology which limits resolution of conflict to the cultural sphere (and sexual roles are cultural) tends to remove the struggle from the concrete, class issues of the day, including those which especially effect women. Interpreted one way, Firestone's scheme is similar to a mechanical Marxism which says: "wait till after the revolution, wait till we have socialism and are building communism, then we'll discuss sex roles." We cannot just transcend exploitation, we have to fight. And Firestone's theory still does not provide us with a way of combining women's struggle with the present class struggle.

SISTERHOOD AND SELF-HELP

The middle and upper-class bourgeois feminist idealistically believed in a unity on the basis of gender alone; she overlooked the very real difference between her oppression and the oppression of the working-class woman. The bourgeois woman was excluded

from production and relegated to domestic duties and, depending on wealth, an excess of leisure. The oppression of the majority of women consisted in either domestic drudgery under conditions of poverty, which was a full-time job, or a combination of paid work and housework. The more difficult it was for reasons of national chauvinism and racism for members of the family to get jobs, the more the distance from the WASP sister was compounded. But as the population becomes proletarianized there develops a more concrete basis for sisterhood. Increasingly, women experience the actual contradictions of the double burden, rather than the powerless ennui of the bird in the gilded cage. The radical critiques which arose from the latter tradition, for example, in Kate Chopin's unusually advanced novel, *The Awakening*,⁽²²⁾ are given more substance by the possibilities for the present unity of the exploited. Now the stage is set for materially transforming society to meet our needs. As part of this, a Marxist critique of male chauvinism under capitalism inherits the best insights of radical feminism and is able to test them in the cauldron of a more advanced struggle.

The interplay between liberal feminism and Marxism continues. Feminist analysis forces socialist liberationists to deal, for example, with sexuality as a social issue. Indeed, making sexuality a public issue, a political issue, a subject 'fit for Marxists' and other revolutionaries, is one of the historical tasks of feminism. But because of their bourgeois view of sexuality, feminists have been unable to advance it as a human health right and to push for the social institutions that would make healthy sex a reality, such as sex education in the schools and sex therapy clinics. Usually the demand has been framed only negatively, that is, to release individuals from the oppression of

22. *The Awakening* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1964).

the family. It is interesting that one of the popular free-love advocates who frames the question in this limited way, Germaine Greer, expects to employ an extended Italian family to care for her children in a warmer clime. But then most feminists who see the struggle against the family form as central have resorted to some form of extended family to take its place, whether it be a commune or an arrangement of convenience—necessary developments but not political solutions. Indeed sometimes communal family life becomes politics for reasons of time. This also happens in the movement for parent-controlled daycare when it is pursued separately from an effort to tax the corporations to pay daycare workers so that parents can be freed of daycare. This lack of vision persists insofar as the woman's movement does not address itself to the immediate needs of working people. As part of this they do not see work relations, of ourselves and the men in our lives, as the basis of our exploitation and the key to our liberation.

Radical feminism sees the negative but not the positive side of the proletarianization of women. In this lies its central shortcoming. It focuses its analysis on a position of weakness, our isolation as housekeepers, wives, and mothers, rather than as workers or potential workers in social production. From this follows the self-help, individualist solutions which define its liberalism politically.

Common to much bourgeois radical feminism is an adulation of characteristics ascribed to woman that are part of her confinement to the domestic sphere: peacefulness, spontaneity, sensitivity to interpersonal tensions, emotional responsiveness, and so on, as opposed to the acquisitive, calculating, distant, aggressive work characteristic of the male. While it is true that motherhood training leaves women with a variety of humanism not usually permitted those socialized as masculine, seeing our emancipation as

dependent on those very traits ascribed as womanly is self-defeating. This leads to such conclusions as Kate Millett's eschewing violence out of hand as a political tactic. Women in Vietnam would have little use for such dogmatic pacifism. But the general orientation has other far-reaching implications for strategy. It is a feminist version of the back-to-the-earth movement of the disenchanted middle-class, an individualist opposition to civilization, well in the tradition of bourgeois anarchism. In its feminist version it can be a kind of back-to-the-earth-mother. (23)

Just as in the rural communal solution freedom is conceived of as freedom from industrial society, so in this kind of feminism freedom is seen as freedom from male chauvinist industrial society. Independence from man is seen as self-realization of the woman. Instead of upgrading women by facilitating their entry into the professions, particularly the scientific professions, and positions of power, back-to-earth-mother feminism seeks to reduce all tasks to something like the petty level of skill required for housekeeping. This effort is a reaction to our exclusion, but its result is only to compound our misery. For example, do-it-yourself gynaecology falls into the apolitical, indeed harmful self-help category. The alternate strategy would be attacking the chauvinism of current gynaecology, encouraging women to become gynaecologists, working politically for improvement of hospital facilities etc.

Do-it-yourself psychiatry is another strategy of the women's movement and has led to the popularity of such writers as Wilhelm Reich and R.D. Laing. In the absence of a good Marxist psychology, many leftists have gone the way of the bourgeois Freudian tradition which substitutes literary metaphor for a real study of

23. Branka Magas develops this point (in "Sex Politics: Class Politics") in her critique of Greer, Millett and Figges.

the mind and social relations.(24)

Freud's view was that sexual repression was the key to civilization.(25) The neo-Freudian Wilhelm Reich argued that extreme sexual repression leads to extreme social oppression, in particular fascism. While it is true that sexual misery can be correlated with social oppression in general, to say it is the cause of other oppressions turns the matter on its head. An exploitative society can reduce individuals to a state of abject fear and mutilate many aspects of our humanity, including our sexuality. But to say that sexual repression causes fascism is as erroneous as believing sexual liberation is the cure, the obvious conclusion of such a theory.

Rebels have often been regarded as neurotic, and this has led women to question whether or not there is any such thing as madness. Laing and his followers, who regard madness as a form of social protest, and schizophrenia as a kind of purification, are popular with some feminists. While it is true that rebellion against confining sex-typed roles has often been wrongly diagnosed as madness, and the label 'neurosis' used as a weapon, there is such a thing as real mental illness. To deny these painful conditions and to negate the value of medical research leads to a mystification of psychosis. Laing reinforces a cavalier attitude toward physiological psychology and the nascent attempts of modern medicine to go beyond palliatives into actual cures for such diseases as schizophrenia.(26) When some feminists read Reich

24. Juliet Mitchell makes a fatal concession to Freudianism by agreeing that psychoanalysis is a science which does not have to be tested like the natural sciences because its subject matter is the unconscious. *Woman's Estate*, (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1971), pp.166-167.

25. Mary James Sherfy accepts this formulation in *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality* (New York: Random House, 1972).

26. Bruce Burns gives us some indication of the complexity of psychosis as a medical question, and in passing places Laing in perspective, in "Trends in British Psychiatry," *Marxism Today* (January 1971).

or Laing, just as liberals have always read Freud, they are not bothering to question the scientific validity as much as they are seeking an individual or small group solution to a malaise. Acquiring sexuality with an orgone blanket or talking someone out of a nervous breakdown apparently offers one an immediate course of action, unlike mass political organizing or years of progressive scientific work.

Granted, radicals resort to unscientific solutions out of frustration. Neither the political system nor in this case the medical facilities allow for much beyond that. But there is a connection between anti-science and opposition to mass organizing. Science is extremely social. Its method is premised on the historical accumulation of discoveries of millions of individuals. It develops over a long period of time, unevenly, but logically and as a consequence of various social needs. In the face of its complex and apparently overwhelming division of labour, any woman who seeks a self-help solution can isolate herself from the ongoing process of science just as she can from mass political action. After all, her education was less oriented to the sciences than that of her male counterparts, just as her appointed sphere of work, the home, was isolated from most social interaction. It is a wonder that women, nurtured for housekeeping, have not gravitated even more toward individual or small group solutions, perceiving their most radical moments to be a return to nature. But it is through creative work relations and through science that we master nature and develop our humanity. Nature is not a better master than a male.

Another strategy which starts from women's role as housekeepers is the movement for state pay for wives and mothers which sometimes justifies itself in the name of Marxist economics. Its most recent proponents are Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma

James.(27) By Dalla Costa's logic women should be remunerated for producing the commodity labour power, that is for performing maintenance chores for children and husbands. But in Marxist economics we do not call reproduction of the family 'production,' precisely because it cannot happen unless the family is supported by someone engaged in production, whether it be the man, the woman, or both. Housework, no matter how much work is involved, is still unproductive consumption, economically speaking. Insofar as woman is relegated to the sphere of consumption her power is reduced. Measures must be taken that decrease woman's role as reproducer rather than solidify her in that place. Dalla Costa and James get themselves into the singularly un-Marxist position of encouraging women not to work (which they argue benefits only capitalism), of opposing the trade unions, of advocating withholding household labour from the family as a central tactic—all this and more as a consequence of basing their strategy on women as housekeepers.

In the last five years, parts of the women's movement have gone in a radical feminist direction, sometimes in the name of Marxism. The critique of the family and male chauvinism has been carried on in many journals and books and is still developing. Much of it is anti-capitalist, but since male chauvinism and the patriarchal family is often seen as the cause of capitalist oppression, the critique of the family usually takes precedence over the critique of capitalism.

27. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, **Women and the Subversion of the Community** and **A Woman's Place** (Bristol, Eng.: Falling Wall Press, 1972). Similar arguments have been advanced by Mary Inman in **Woman Power** (Los Angeles, 1942), and answered by A. Landy in **Marxism and the Woman Question** (Toronto: Progress Books, 1943), and by Isabel Largaia and John Dumoulin in "Toward a Science of Women's Liberation," **Political Affairs** (June and August 1972), and answered by Margaret Cowl in "Economic Role of the Housewife," **Political Affairs** (August 1972).

It is not possible at this point to respond to all feminist criticisms with a fully developed Marxist critique. What I will attempt is to show where we can begin, and touch upon some of the questions with which we must deal.

A MARXIST ALTERNATIVE TO FEMINIST THEORY

Is sex or class the primary contradiction? If one accepts the fundamentals of historical materialism, then conditions of labour determine, in the long run, human life. Conditions of labour include the technological base and who appropriates the product of your work. Sex *would* be the primary contradiction if all males owned the means of production and all females worked for them. But almost all males and females, under capitalism, work for some males, not by virtue of the latter's maleness, but because they own property. And this is the essence of the Marxist critique of bourgeois feminism.

Feminists charge that defining a woman by virtue of the class position of her father or husband obscures the oppressive relation between male provider and woman. But this overlooks the fact that the oppression of man over woman would not exist for long if the man were not in the first place a provider in a *class* society. It is precisely because a woman usually needs the remuneration of a male breadwinner, since she lacks access to subsistence jobs for herself and her children, that she must defer to her mate and males in general. Subsistence in our society is something between \$6,000 and \$10,000 per year; women's average salary in Canada is far below \$4,000. This is the meaning of *economic base*: much that occurs between men and women is of a non-economic nature, but where they must live, with whom, and by means of what, these are determined by economic factors, and they in turn

determine the parameters of male-female relationships.

This is best explained by the concept of primary and secondary contradiction. Historical materialism holds that in a society founded on private property the class struggle is primary: racial, national, and sex contradictions are secondary. What this means in short is that sexism cannot be explained without reference to the dynamics of class, while an explanation of the broadest outlines of class dynamics does not require a theory of sex. The resolution of sexist contradictions requires the resolution of class contradictions. Of course the relation between the resolutions of the two contradictions is dialectical, and this is a second key concept, without which the concept of primary and secondary is useless. The struggle against chauvinism is political, and like other democratic struggles for self-determination, such as the franchise and national autonomy, its secondary nature in no way detracts from its importance, since political struggles against the bourgeoisie in these many forms is an important part of the class struggle. *Part of the meaning of 'primary' is that in acting politically, one keeps the overall development of the class struggle in mind in deciding which one of the secondary contradictions is the order of the day.* An example of a current form of the class struggle is the alliance of a national bourgeoisie, peasants, and workers, in an anti-imperialist war such as Vietnam.

In any event, formulating the problem simply as a question of what is more 'important', sex or class, is mechanical (in the technical Marxist sense). To say that a social process develops dialectically is to recognize that struggle to overcome secondary contradictions in the process sometimes takes precedence over struggle to overcome primary ones. For example, the general strike and other direct manifestations of the primary contradiction, the class struggle, are not

even usually, let alone always, the order of the day. They are inter-related with other struggles, which though strictly involving secondary contradictions, may be nonetheless parts of the political struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Dorothy Ballan criticizes interpreting the primacy of class struggle to mean subordination of the women's struggle. Her essay is a defense of Engels' position on women, but this is consistent with her formulation of the implications of Engels' theory.

The women's struggle is not subordinate to the class struggle. It is itself a form of class struggle, especially if consciously conducted against the bourgeoisie. The struggle against male supremacy and women's oppression is a crucially important political struggle and all manifestations of chauvinism in an organization, and most importantly in a revolutionary organization, are a reflection of the ideology of the bourgeoisie and must be fought as part of the revolutionary struggle.

What's involved here is the confusion of the primacy of the overall historical character of the class struggle with the supremacy of any particular political struggle against the bourgeoisie....Marx said that every political struggle is a class struggle.

A great deal of harm is done in the radical movement in the name of Marxism by those who in reality do subordinate the struggle for women's liberation and do practice male supremacy.

But this should no more disqualify the Marxist, materialist interpretation of historical phenomena than the presence of a multitude of fraudulent medical quacks should disqualify the theory and practice of medicine.(28)

The terms primary and secondary were developed as part of a Leninist application of historical materialism necessary for action against the bourgeoisie. But they are also necessary concepts for historical explanation in general, explanation for the purpose of action against the bourgeoisie being a specific application of historical materialism.

I think it is possible to criticize both some feminists and some traditional Marxists for holding simplistic and mechanical views of the woman question. Liberal feminists regard the male-female division as the primary contradiction; the mechanical Marxists are unable to integrate the secondary contradictions of women's oppression into either a theory of historical explanation or a theory of political action, the latter presupposing the former.

The term 'secondary' is not merely a catch-all: the onus is still on Marxism to fit the family, reproduction, etc., into the Marxist theory of history. In this theory 'family' is a dependent variable. Breadwinners are the units in the family which tie the family to the exchange economy under capitalism. That is why woman's position in production is crucial to her position in the family as well. And that is why marriage is a property relation even if the family owns nothing: the family members under capitalism (and the state enforces this) have a right to part of the product of the breadwinner's labour. Services from the mother and submission to parental authority are part of this arrangement. Capitalism must reproduce and maintain labour power; therefore, maintenance of the worker's family is included in the wages bill. (Subsistence includes the cost of reproduction, and wages tend toward subsistence.) The woman's domestic work is itself without value. Her double oppression exists in the fact that she is sustained by either her own or her husband's wages from outside the family to perform unpaid labour in the home. The family changes as the labour force changes, from rural to urban, small property to wage labour, different kinds of wage labour, (for example, highly skilled, unskilled, migratory). Whether households contain extended kin, double breadwinners, or are women-headed, etc., depends in large part on how the labour force is recruited. The way in which a family serves as an

emotional refuge, socializer of children, and welfare sanctuary varies according to many cultural and economic factors, but its existence is premised on source of income.

The editors of *Women: A Journal of Liberation* show unintentionally in their criticism of Marxist history of women that Marxists are quite correct in relegating 'family' to the superstructure, while the long run moving force of development remains in the forces and relations of production, both of which are in the base. "It is our hypothesis that reproduction and socialization have influenced production, not by the power to transform it, but by the power to stabilize it." By its very nature women's work is usually limited to maintenance. The ultimately decisive factors historically are changes in labour productivity and, after the advent of private property, changes in labour productivity have taken place largely in the most socialized sections of production, spheres in which women have been subordinated drastically, or excluded entirely, until fairly recently.

But this is still not a complete answer to liberal feminism. Most important is that to ignore the primacy of class struggle is to assume either that capitalism can liberate women (reformism) or that the defeat of the family and chauvinism can of itself destroy capitalism, or at least precede its downfall (two versions of radical feminism). If any of these positions is right, the question of socialism is superfluous, from the point of view of liberating women.

I think that an extension of the defense of socialist liberation must include a theory of the fate of women after socialism. Since the place of women involves secondary contradictions, why will women necessarily be liberated with the resolution of the primary contradiction of the class struggle? I wish to argue that the oppression of women, while not primary, is nonetheless crucial to capitalism, and the liberation of

women, while not primary, is nonetheless crucial for the development of socialism.

To a certain extent capitalism liberated women from feudalism, 'freed' them to sell their labour power, which brought them into social production. But it also alienated them, along with men, from the product of their labour to an extent unprecedented in history.

The endeavour of women to secure economic self-support and personal independence has, to a certain degree, been recognized as legitimate by bourgeois society, the same as the endeavour of the workingman after greater freedom of motion. The principal reason for such acquiescence lies in the class interests of the bourgeoisie itself. The bourgeoisie, or capitalist class, requires the free and unrestricted purveyance of male and female labour-power for the fullest development of production. (29)

It is also necessary but not profitable for capitalism to reproduce the workers. The burden is placed on the worker's private family, usually most of the unpaid labour falls to the woman. The family burden puts the woman at a bargaining disadvantage in her work force participation: unprepared, untrained, limited by children's schedules, etc., the woman tends to have to settle for what job she can get, and capitalists have always taken advantage of this. Women's partial integration into the work force is in some ways more complicated and oppressive than preserving and increasingly remunerating the housewife role. This is the nature of contradictory development. It is the contradiction between home and work roles, but the necessity of the latter, that drives women to resist their oppression.

Why do women work? Valerie Kincade Openheimer concludes that the American economic system, in any case, needs their labour power; it is a

matter of supply and demand.(30) But why does capitalism need them while some men are still unemployed? In the first place, working women outnumber many times the number of men unemployed. Secondly, there must be a male labour reserve army, to some extent, for the male labour market; the constant retraining necessary for switching workers into separate labour markets reaches a point of diminishing returns. Thirdly, and very importantly, increasing the labour power necessary for the subsistence of a family—and this is the main purpose in doubling the number of necessary breadwinners per family—is a way of increasing the rate of exploitation. Fourthly, there is no doubt that increasing the number of woman-typed low wage jobs in the labour force is a way of keeping the cost of labour power down and, as part of this, presenting barriers to trade unionism. A job classification in which many participants consider their work 'extra' income is qualitatively harder to organize than if they were all sole or principal breadwinners. Sexism, like racism, divides the exploited so they are less able to fight the oppressor. Sexism, like racism, creates separate labour markets and labour reserve armies. The cheap labour, like the unpaid domestic labour, is fundamental to the maintenance of our profit-making economy.

To the extent that women figure in the productive and reproductive process under capitalism, the history of the struggle for women's liberation can be understood against the background of the central contradiction of capitalism. Capitalism does two things simultaneously. It tends to socialize the forces of production while at the same time concentrating ownership of the means of production, thereby increasing the disparities between exploiter and ex-

30. Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer, *The Female Labour Force in the United States*, (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1970), p.49.

exploited. Socialization of the productive forces means that the factories and offices become increasingly collective and rationalized, the division of labour becomes more complex, more workers co-operate in the same production process, the discipline needed for successful production becomes more far-reaching. Profit becomes less and less an economic criterion for investment. And an increasingly disciplined working class is on hand to recognize this fact, a working class which creates the surplus value the capitalists rake off in the first place.

Some of the reproduction and maintenance of labour power is becoming socialized as well, and is both privately and publicly subsidized. Universal education is an example: capitalism needs a more or less literate work force, although only in the advanced countries. Parallel with the rationalization of the productive forces, reproduction begins to be rationalized. For example, voluntary childbirth or birth control, is part of the rationalization of reproduction, commensurate with the needs of women who increasingly work. Abortion on demand becomes a 'right' that the economy can both demographically and technologically afford, and that women can win. Daycare is part of the socialization of functions which originally, under capitalism, were totally privatized in families.

Some of this begins to happen under capitalism: economic and social development of itself tends to demand it. But it is not usually profitable. And not only is instruction in birth control not particularly profitable, reactionary views on this issue are part of an absolutist defense of certain family forms and a conservative concept of women as baby machines and sex objects. This is all part of a chauvinist culture which is both an extension and reinforcer of a profitable division of labour. (It is no accident that, in addition to its racism and national chauvinism, the

right wing launches an attack on sex education in the schools.) Usually for the system as a whole childcare is socially necessary but not profitable, so it is put on the backs of women and is regarded as peripheral to the exchange economy.

The 'intensity' (Marx's term) of labour power, its degree of skill or ability to produce, is tied in with the education of the possessor of the labour power, and that education varies by sex. Part of the socialization of the forces of production includes the breakdown of the sexual division of labour, replacing it with a more rational labour division which does not waste so many human resources. But girl children are still streamed into educational programmes commensurate with their family roles being primary, so as wives and mothers they can cheaply reproduce the next generation of workers. This is a clear example of the contradiction between rationalization of the forces of production (including equal education) and the persistence of general profit considerations which demand captive and doubly exploitable women.

It is enough to say that the contradictions between home responsibilities and work demands are intensified under capitalism where the latter is increasingly social (more education required, more rational methods and organization) and yet still privately owned and operated for profit. It is because the central human need of reproduction and socialization of children is subject to all the anarchy of capitalism that women can less and less bear the contradictions. For the home burden under these conditions makes women less and less able to compete in a labour force where higher education and more advanced skills are increasingly required. Their motivations to resist capitalism are intensified by capitalism's very development. Women are learning that capitalism can well afford to socialize the burdens of the home. They are also realizing that capitalism

can well afford to prepare them for work roles equal to men. The dual role of wife-mother and worker increases women's dissatisfactions in both spheres. In many ways the woman feels the contradiction between privatization and socialization more keenly than anyone under capitalism: this is part of the basis of her revolutionary potential.

One sometimes gets the impression that some early socialists envisaged the emancipation of women as automatically arising from her participation in production. But it is *full integration* in production that is necessary, and a condition for equality in production is the socialization of many of the child-care and domestic functions which are the material basis for women's inequality with men in the labour force. Even where schools of higher education do not discriminate against women, a woman with children is far more handicapped in struggling through training than a child-free man, particularly for specialist roles and positions of political administration. For this reason I think Mitchell's attempt to integrate the other 'structures' of women's condition into production is crucial.

A mechanical socialist formulation of the problem might be the following: Women are exploited by capitalism as are men. They are also oppressed as women. Males within the working class do not usually fight for equality because 1) they consider women competition for their jobs and 2) the *idea* of male chauvinism pervades their consciousness because of this fear. But this leaves out a step. Chauvinistic attitudes and chauvinist sexuality are not merely expressions of the fear of female competition, they are reflections of the existence and fetishization of the motherhood role itself. Fetishization of female childrearing creates a sexual division of labour in almost every sphere of life, a material difference of experience that cannot be reduced to a simple

rationalization of alleged mental inferiority. Chauvinism is constantly reaffirmed by the perpetuation of the feminine childrearing 'monopoly' itself. This elementary division of childrearing labour by sex is at the root of the inequalities in the work force where 1) women are driven to the more alienating jobs at less pay in part because of the motherhood demands made on them by their husbands and children (who are, of course, forced to make the demands because of the system), and 2) women are assigned motherhood-type roles (service, education) in the work force. Women cannot compete because of the added material burdens of wifery and motherhood: motherhood is part of the material base of sexual inequality. Capitalism did not just pick chauvinism out of the air and virtually force it on the working class in order to divide and rule and super-exploit (which is just about a description of the inculcation of racism since the advent of black slavery in the 1600's). Rather, patriarchal attitudes are in large part the result of experiencing woman first as mother and then as wife, in fetishized roles so close to immediate experience that they affect just about every aspect of the personality. Often, while the two tactics of equal pay and daycare are advocated in the concrete, overcoming male chauvinism is formulated in the abstract. This overlooks the fact that women will not actually achieve equal work in practice short of the socialization of maternity, which means that parenthood must be shared, in the sense that males and females participate equally in childrearing.

And for this socialism is necessary. The kinds of changes necessary to liberate women from the female monopoly' of childrearing would necessarily be so far-reaching and unprofitable for capitalism, that the workers would need the ownership of the means of production simply to make them possible. Capitalism cannot support both multi-billion dollar war and multi-

billion dollar daycare, equal education, industrialization of domestic labour, socialized recreation, and all those institutions that would make the *mother- and wife- centred* family a relic. (I think we often underestimate the enormity of the expense and labour power of a universal crèche system. Shortage of labour power in developing socialist countries is still a major block to completing the socialization of infant care.) At the point when the fetishization of female childrearing, or motherhood, becomes a fetter on the development of the forces of production, instead of a probably necessary catch-all for all manner of burdens in an unevenly developed society, people will decide for themselves how they want motherhood tasks socially differentiated. The contention here is simply that in the absence of private property considerations, the rationalization of the forces of production will create the technological and social conditions for male-female equality. Although many of the fruits of unalienated social production affect men and women in similar ways, the way in which society adapts its reproductive tasks to the mode of production is of particular importance to women. Perhaps struggle on this will constitute the primary contradiction at some point in the transition from socialism to communism, a primary contradiction hopefully of the non-antagonistic variety.

STRATEGY

The most serious shortcoming of much radical feminism is that it fails to develop a strategy around the real needs of working class women, whether they are housewives or paid workers or both. A working class strategy would put at the centre the following issues: 1) struggle at the workplace and in the trade unions for equal pay for work of equal value; 2) organizing the unorganized; 3) a mass movement to

tax the corporations for universal state daycare, democratically controlled. Daycare would be an extension of the public school system and as much our right as public education. Abortion, birth control, combatting sexism in the media, and so on, are all related to these movements, but direct confrontation on work and childcare is still the key to women's emancipation.

To achieve these gains women will have to work in a variety of organizations, sometimes with men and sometimes not. Avoiding these organizations or failing to set them up has been one of the reasons women's liberationists have been unable to mobilize large masses of people for daycare and equal pay. The success of abortion campaigns has been due partly to the fact that the illegality of abortion is the kind of clear-cut injustice which lends itself to a single issue campaign, that of getting a law off the books. It immediately becomes a nation-wide issue.

Work issues are plant, office, or industry-oriented, and day care is a very local, long-term struggle. It involves legislation at various levels, as provisions for subsidy are at present provincial and municipal, though they should be federal, for that is the only level where we have access to corporation taxes.⁽³¹⁾ To develop equal pay and daycare as national issues will require much groundwork and many coalitions.

It is true that women in the movement have been unfairly criticized for 'consciousness-raising.' This tactic certainly has its place: due to family responsibilities women are isolated. Furthermore, women are not respected intellectually. This makes necessary a period of building up confidence in order to speak out politically, to discover that problems hitherto believed

31. See Barb Cameron and Lesley Towers. "The Case for Universal Daycare," in **The Daycare Book** (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972).

to be personal are in fact social, and that to fight against them is political. But consciousness-raising without mass political work is a cul-de-sac. In individual psychiatry in the best Freudian tradition, the patient talks until she reveals what is in her unconscious, and either makes an adjustment or chooses to change the course of her life. Sometimes autonomous women's politics proceeds as a kind of collective psychiatry. It is presumed that your chains consist simply of false notions of the family and woman's place. Once these are revealed and admitted, it is assumed, personal liberation follows. Politics could be limited to propagandizing this revelation.

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CONCLUSION

The efforts to find a 'new Marxism,' purified in the cauldron of woman's consciousness, is as natural to the women's movement as other 'separate attempts'—separate women's political parties, separate women's trade unions, and some kind of never-quite-becoming autonomous women's movement. It could well be that these represent stages in injecting women's issues into the left generally, but stages constantly re-emerging far into the struggle for socialism. In part, the theory we demand for such struggle is and will be a product of science which can only be developed fully in a socialist society. But even in its present undeveloped stage, this science is one of our most important weapons. There can be no *isolated* super-theory of women's liberation. The next thing on the agenda is a more developed Marxist psychology to analyze sexuality, socialization, and the myriad of aspects of development involved in our liberation. And since this requires scientific and medical advances of a kind not yet available to us, the questions have scarcely surfaced, let alone the answers.

MARXISM AND FEMINISM is a critical examination of feminist thought since the eighteenth century, from a Marxist perspective. It is a response to the growing dissatisfaction with feminist writing which declares simply that men oppress women, sometimes describes how, but falls short of examining why. In this book some of the early proponents of women's rights are examined, including J.S. Mill and the suffragists. The Marxist analysis of Engels is clarified. More recent contributors, writing from the tradition of radical feminism or attempting Marxist explanations, fall under scrutiny: Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Juliet Mitchell and Shulamith Firestone. Guettel takes a critical look at the issues and the theory arising from these in the women's movement today (daycare, equal pay, abortion, consciousness raising, paid housework). The book makes the case that the oppression of women is a consequence of capitalism, and that fighting against women's oppression is part of the class struggle. The liberation of women depends on socialism, and the further development of socialism depends in part on the further liberation of women. Only under socialism is the basis for women's emancipation—industrialization of housework, socialization of childcare, and the total entry of women into work of equal value—possible.

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